

Some Days Like I'm Barely Breathing by deandratb

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Summary:

Post-S1; Hopper arrives uninvited. *What he could possibly need from her...want from her...Joyce has no idea. She's got so little left that's worth giving. But he's warm, and right there, and she's so deep-down cold to the bone that she's forgotten what warm feels like.*

Some Days Like I'm Barely Breathing

Author's Note:

Nobody asked for this; I don't know why I couldn't get this out of my head and focus on all the stories I **should** be writing...but I couldn't. I just really love them.

PS: I haven't seen S2 yet, so if anything is not canon-compliant, it's purely by accident and I'm unaware of it.

Hopper comes to her door in the middle of the day, fist slamming against the wood like it's the gravest of emergencies. And when she opens it, he holds his finger to his lips, just like last time.

Her first thought is *holy shit, not again. Not Will*. He's just starting to get his bearings, back in school with his friends, driven there and home every day by Jonathan so she can breathe a little easier.

Joyce is miles from finding her own footing again; too shaken, too shattered. She's hearing the whispers she used to be too busy to notice, about Jonathan's photography and Will's fragility and her crazy.

God knows that last one doesn't surprise her. They're not wrong, and she hasn't got the energy to feel offended. She's ready to snap at the next kid who mimics the way her little boy walks: dazed and dreamy, only half in the world. She's ready to slap the next parent who insinuates that her eldest, the anchor of her scrappy family, is twisted or perverted or **wrong**.

They are the only good that Joyce knows for certain she'll get to leave behind in this world, and watching the town turn on them after they survived the worst possible odds--it's too much.

So, she's not back at work yet. She took an extra week without pay, juggling the budget to give her room to look after Will. Now that he's back to his routine, that extra week is giving her room to look after herself.

Then Hopper barges into their home, bringing all of it back to her doorstep, silencing her with a gesture like the government will be pulling up any moment.

Joyce steps out of his way, shutting the door behind him. And while she's trying to figure out how to get answers if Hopper won't let her speak, he's suddenly in her space, backing her up, pressing her against the paneling until she can barely breathe and she understands that this isn't about Will at all.

This is about them, the cavernous darkness of the Upside Down as he saved her son and lost his daughter all over again. This is him telling her she was hallucinating Will after they found the body--then telling her she was right all along. This is Jonathan confessing later that the Chief was there at the worst of it; that Hopper called her *strong*, when she was at her weakest.

The whispers she's been listening to, the ones about them that confused her the most, she finally understands.

Hopper towers over her, he always has, and with his hands gripping her arms and eyes locked on hers, she has the insane feeling that he could swallow her whole.

Worse than that, absolutely terrifying, is the answering knowledge that a part of her wants him to. She wants to just disappear in him, let him take her out of the world for a while. This horrible world where little girls become science experiments and little boys get taken.

She's tired of it, *so goddamn tired*.

With him, she knows she could rest. Hopper's a rough, grief-drowned drunk, but he would die keeping her safe--she's certain of that.

What he could possibly need from her...want from her...Joyce has no idea. She's got so little left that's worth giving. But he's warm, and right there, and she's so deep-down cold to the bone that she's forgotten what warm feels like.

So she takes what she needs and lets Hop do the same; the small-

minded judgmental town gossips can go to hell.

He leaves her bruised in three places; he kisses all of them after.

She digs her nails into his bare back without even realizing it--the raw, red skin facing her in the afterglow brings her back to reality.

“Hop...what--”

He rests his fingertips--not a finger, not like before, but three of his fingertips, uncharacteristically gently, against her bottom lip.

She's looking at him, and finally seeing him. **Really** seeing him, the hero and the broken man, his lakewater eyes full of something she can't place whenever he looks back at her.

As soon as it's clear she'll stay quiet, Hopper kisses her. Slower than before, deep instead of frantic. Whatever it was that brought him to her in the middle of a Tuesday afternoon, it's settled now. Coiled back up inside him, until the next time he can't control it any longer.

Joyce can understand that, even though what drives her mad is the other side of the same coin. Anxiety and grief is a monster sitting on her chest trying to get in, rather than a beast clawing its way out--but it leaves her alone and gasping for air in the middle of the night just the same.

She can breathe now, with her head on his chest and Hop running his fingers through her hair.

She can close her eyes without seeing it happen all over again.

Before they get dressed and go back to their lives and **not** talk about it, she can be someone other than Will's mom or Jonathan's absentee parent or the most underappreciated employee at the store.

For a few moments, a few quiet, perfect moments, she can be his.

And that's enough.

Author's Note:

Title borrowed from "Beautiful Trauma" by Pink.